

Senate Looking to Regulate Kids' Access to Cyberporn

L.A. TIMES/WASHINGTON POST NEWS SERVICE
WASHINGTON — Patricia Shao, a mother of two who lives in Bethesda, Md., is the first to say that she's "not a 1950s kind of mother." But she was shocked last month to discover that her 13-year-old daughter had been propositioned electronically while using America Online.

Shao was one of two parents who testified Monday before the Senate Judiciary Committee in what Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, said was the first congressional hearing on regulating indecent and obscene material on the Internet.

Last month, Grassley asked Congress to outlaw "computer system operators (who) knowingly transmit indecent material to a child ... (and) 'willfully' permit their system to be used as a conduit for indecent communications intended for children."

Monday Grassley said, "Suddenly not even the home is safe. ... We in Congress can't just sit by and sit this one out." The testimony, however, illustrated how even the seemingly protecting kids on-line can become easily entangled in controversy and in wrangling over definitions.

For example, one Florida 15-year-old, Donelle Gruff — who had been described at the hearing as a "victim" of on-line abuse — told a reporter, "I wouldn't tell anyone not to go on-line. It's fun. You learn a lot. You've just got to be careful."

Early this year, Gruff was invited to peruse a local electronic bulletin board.

The person who ran it, "Bill," soon began asking her personal questions, and electronically following her as she went to other bulletin boards. Bill knew where Donelle lived because she had supplied her address when she signed up to use his bulletin board.

He later showed up in person at her house and even followed her as she went to a local bowling alley. Although Donelle's family calls the case on-line "stalking," Sgt. Stephanie Campbell of the Pinellas County (Fla.) Sheriff's Department said that the occasional contact between the 20-year-old bulletin board operator and Donelle did not fall under the state's stalking law.

Barry F. Crimmins, a writer and children's rights advocate in Lakewood, Ohio, said that the number of pornographic images he has seen on-line horrifies him. "What has recently taken place is nothing short of the de facto decriminalization of child pornography," he told the senators.

"I think the laws about transmission or trafficking in child pornography are fine," he said later, although he advocates more money be spent enforcing them. "But perhaps we need a new law, dealing with accessories and facilitators — like America Online in particular," he added.

Industry representatives argued that the market was beginning to address such problems by creating software that parents could use to filter out objectionable material. According to America Online's counsel,

William Burrington, the company now has 24 people monitoring the creation of "public chat rooms," where many salacious comments have been exchanged. "We're going to double that number (of monitors) again," Burrington pledged.

Both Burrington and Jerry Berman, executive director of the Center for Democracy and Technology, a civil liberties organization, argued against the need for additional legislation.

Although Grassley has argued that his bill is narrowly focused on reducing pornography aimed at children, Berman contended that "the statute is in fact strikingly broad," potentially applying to any organization that "merely" provides minors with a way to tap into the Internet.

Berman said that, "Confusion as to providers' legal duty will create a tremendous chilling effect on all on-line communications."

"Any attempt to impose centralized content control in a bureaucratic manner on this fundamentally decentralized medium is bound to stifle the growth of the medium (and) squander the democratic potential of the Internet," Berman contended.

But to mothers, including Shao and Susan Tillman Elliot, of McLean, Va., the unpleasant experiences their teenagers had when they encountered obscene materials and propositions on on-line networks outweigh concerns about the growth of the Internet.

Paris Tense After Subway Bombing

ASSOCIATED PRESS
PARIS — Police increased patrols of Paris subways Wednesday after a bomb killed five people and injured more than 80 on a rush-hour train. The interior minister told citizens to be on the lookout for suspicious people and packages.

Despite the increased police presence, a man committed suicide today at the exact spot of the bombing by jumping in front of a train at the St. Michel station in the Latin Quarter.

The man was not immediately identified.

There was no claim of responsibility for the attack, but speculation most often fell on two possibilities: a militant Islamic group fighting the government in Algeria, which has the tacit backing of France, its former colonial ruler; or on Bosnian Serbs in retaliation for a reported French attack Sunday on their positions in the rebel stronghold of Pale.

About 1,800 extra police were sent to train stations, airports and large shopping centers around the country amid fears that a string of terrorist attacks might occur as they did in 1986, the year of the last fatal bombings in Paris.

Police were searching coin-operated lockers at Paris train stations, Interior Minister Jean-Louis Debre said.

"You must help us," Debre said in an interview on the radio network France-Inter. "You must be vigilant about packages you notice, about people who act suspiciously."

He said he hoped "all citizens will rally to fight terrorism."

Two French-based Muslim groups condemned the attack. The Union of Islamic Organizations in France and the National Coordination of Muslims of France called the bombing "a barbarous act aiming to disrupt the peace and security of our society."

The bomb exploded at 5:30 p.m. as the train pulled into the Saint-Michel station along the Seine River near Notre Dame cathedral. The explosion set off a smoky fire inside the train, shattered glass and tangled metal.

The train was part of the RER system that serves Paris' suburbs and is separate from the Paris Metro underground system.

One of Paris' busiest tourist areas, St. Michel quickly became an open-air hospital. More than 500 police, medics and

firefighters were at the scene.

A cafe was turned into a rescue base, where some victims with minor injuries were treated.

They straggled out of the subway station, some with tears streaming down their smoke-blackened faces, their clothes tattered and bloodstained.

Many were carried out on stretchers, motionless and covered in blood.

Four people died on Tuesday and a fifth person died today of injuries suffered in the attack.

Two of the dead, both residents of the Paris region, were identified early today as Isabelle Costa, a Portuguese national, and Veronique Brocheriou.

Thirty-four of the people injured in the bombing were hospitalized overnight and three remained in critical condition today, authorities said.

It was the first fatal bombing in Paris in nearly a decade. A series of bomb blasts around Paris in 1986 left 13 people dead and more than 100 injured.

An Iranian-backed Lebanese group claimed responsibility for the attacks, which targeted department stores, the City Hall and other sites.

Open Meetings Law Violated By Surry County

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DOBSON — A Surry County Superior Court judge has ruled that the county commissioners violated the state Open Meetings Law by refusing to release information about land that the board discussed in a closed session May 15.

Judge Judson D. DeRamus Jr. ruled Monday that the owners, locations and purposes of the properties should have been discussed in public. He ordered the county to pay half of the legal costs for the newspaper that brought the lawsuit.

The ruling meant that the closed meet-

ings were illegally called. Under state law, people can ask the court to invalidate anything done at an illegally called meeting.

After the ruling, Piedmont Publishing Co., which publishes the Winston-Salem Journal, withdrew its request for the court to void the action the board took in the closed session.

The newspaper's attorney, Hugh Stevens, said this was the first time to his knowledge that the issues concerning land acquisition and the state open-meetings law have been ruled on in court.

Piedmont Publishing filed the lawsuit

June 2 against the Surry County Board of Commissioners and County Manager Dennis N. Thompson.

The lawsuit said that in the closed session May 15 the commissioners agreed to buy options on five pieces of property. The board refused to disclose before the closed meeting what land they wanted to buy and after the meeting county officials refused to release any information or records about the properties until May 31.

Then officials released information about only two tracts — which the owners had already signed option agreements.

Agent Challenges Clinton's Claims

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, D.C. — In an account directly at odds with the White House, a Secret Service officer testified Wednesday that he saw Hillary Rodham Clinton's top aide leave Vincent Foster's office area with a stack of documents the night of Foster's death.

Margaret Williams, the first lady's chief of staff, "was carrying, in her arms and her hands, what I would describe as file folders," Secret Service officer Henry P. O'Neill told the Senate Whitewater Committee. "She walked past me ... and started to enter her office. She came out a few moments later and locked her office," he said. O'Neill said he witnessed the incident after he returned to Foster's office suite to secure the doors after learning of Foster's 1993 suicide.

Williams has denied removing anything from the office, and the White House has said she passed a lie detector test. The White House has said three aides, including Williams, briefly searched the late deputy counsel's office for a suicide note but that none was found, and no papers were removed.

The Senate committee is trying to determine whether the White House tried to hide police sensitive files in Foster's office, including documents involving the Clinton's Whitewater deal.

On Tuesday, presidential aide Patsy Thomasson, who accompanied Williams on a brief search, testified that neither she nor Williams nor anyone else removed anything from Foster's office. Thomasson testified her boss, former presidential aide W. David Watkins, called her from a restaurant after learning that Foster, the deputy White House counsel, had shot himself in a park.

Thomasson insisted there was nothing sinister about the visit and that no evidence was hidden or destroyed. "I was in shock. I was in disbelief," she testified. "I thought that if someone was going to leave a suicide note, they would leave it where it could be easily found."

Thomasson said she found nothing after checking the top of Foster's office furniture, glancing into desk drawers and quickly peeking into a briefcase under the desk. Six days later, aides found a torn handwritten note from Foster lamenting his troubled times in Washington in that briefcase.

O.J. Trial Drafting Another N.C. Prof

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WINSTON-SALEM — O.J. Simpson's lead attorney will travel to North Carolina to argue for enforcement of a subpoena against a screenwriting professor.

Attorney Johnnie Cochran Jr. will appear Friday in Forsyth County Superior Court in Winston-Salem to argue that Laura Hart McKinny should surrender videotaped interviews of Detective Mark Fuhrman.

Cochran also wants McKinny to come to Los Angeles to testify at Simpson's trial.

McKinny, a professor in the filmmaking school at the North Carolina School of the Arts, is resisting the subpoena, which was filed July 20.

She and her attorneys will hold a news conference at 3 p.m. Wednesday.

"We'll be discussing why she was served, why she's opposing the execution of the subpoena," attorney Matthew Schwartz of Los Angeles, who is in Winston-Salem, said Tuesday.

McKinny could not be reached for comment. She did not answer a message left at her home and calls to her office were referred to Schwartz.

Simpson's defense team hired Robert Craig, a lawyer in Burlington, N.C., as the local attorney. Craig said Monday that McKinny interviewed Fuhrman and other Los Angeles police officers about their jobs between 1985 and 1994.

"She's got certain tapes and transcripts that the defense thinks can show that Fuhrman has made numerous statements in the past that are racist," he said.

Simpson's attorneys have characterized Fuhrman as a racist, and their attacks on him have questioned whether he might have planted evidence.

McKinny told the Winston-Salem Journal last week that she uses her interviews as a basis for writing screenplays.

Cochran also wants one of McKinny's screenplays, she told the paper. She said she expects her attorney will resist the subpoena under the First Amendment, which guarantees free speech and a free press.

A reluctant Judge William Wood will hear Cochran's argument to enforce the subpoena. "I had no desire to be a part of that," Wood said of the Simpson trial.

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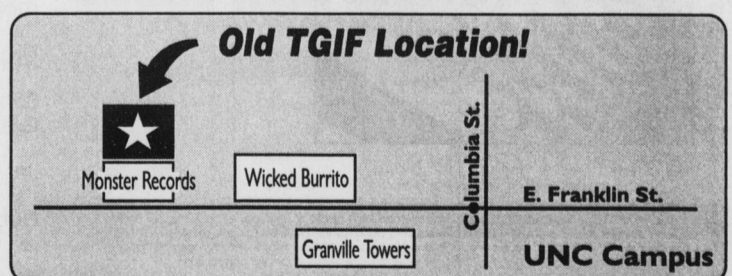
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